

OUT OF THE FLAME

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

TWENTIETH-CENTURY HARLEQUINADE

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DISCURSIONS

Essays on Travel, Art and Life



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The Author
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OUT OF THE FLAME

BY

OSBERT SITWELL

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BOOK I

OUT OF THE FLAME

TWO MEXICAN PIECES

I. SONG

“Ah! Que bonitos
Son los enanos,
Los chiquititos,
Y Mezicanos.”

Old Mexican Song.

HOW jolly are the dwarfs, the little ones, the Mexicans
Hidden by the singing of wind through sugar-cane,
Out comes the pretty one,
Out comes the ugly one,
Out comes the dwarf with the wicked smile and thin.

The little women caper and simper and flutter fans,
The little men laugh, stamp, strut and stamp again,
Dance to the bag-pipe drone,
Of insect semitone,
Swelling from ground slashed with light like zebra skin.

The little Cardinal, the humming-bird, whose feathers flare
Like flame across the valley of volcanic stone,
Fiery arrow from a rainbow
That the armoured plants have slain, low
Stoops to watch the dwarfs as they dance out of sight.

Hair, long and black as jet, is floating yet on amber air
Honey-shaded by the shadow of Popacatapetl's cone,
Their fluttering reboses
Like purple-petal'd roses
Fall through tropic din with a clatter of light.

The crooked dwarf now ripples the strings of a mandoline,
His floating voice has wings that brush us like a butterfly;

Music fills the mountains
With a riot of fountains
That spray back on the hot plain like a waterfall.

Smaller grow the dwarfs, singing "I'll bring shoes of satin,"
Smaller they grow, fade to golden motes, then die.
Where is the pretty one,
Where is the ugly one,
Where is that tongue of flame, the little Cardinal?

II. MAXIXE

“Los enanitos
Se enajaren.”

Old Mexican Song.

THE Mexican dwarfs can dance for miles
Stamping their feet and scattering smiles,
Till the loud hills laugh and laugh again
At the dancing dwarfs in the golden plain,
Till the bamboos sing as the dwarfs dance by,
Kicking their feet at a jagged sky,
That torn by leaves and gashed by hills
Rocks to the rhythm the hot sun shrills ;
The bubble sun stretches shadows that pass
To noiseless jumping-jacks of glass,
So long and thin, so silent and opaque,
That the lions shake their orange manes, and quake ;
And a shadow that leaps over Popacatapetl
Terrifies the tigers as they settle
Cat-like limbs, cut with golden bars,
Under bowers of flowers that shimmer like stars.
Buzzing of insects flutters above,
Shaking the rich trees' treasure-trove
Till the fruit rushes down like a comet, whose tail
Thrashes the night with its golden flail,
The fruit hisses down with a plump from its tree
Like the singing of a rainbow as it dips into the sea.
Loud red trumpets of great blossoms blare
Triumphantly like heralds who blow a fanfare,
Till the humming-bird, bearing heaven on its wing,
Flies from the terrible blossoming,
And the humble honey-bee is frightened by the fine
Honey that is heavy like money and purple like wine,
While birds that flaunt their pinions like pennons
Shriek from their trees of oranges and lemons,

And the scent rises up in a cloud, to make
The hairy, swinging monkeys feel so weak
That they each throw down a bitten coconut or mango.

.

Up flames a flamingo over the fandango,
Glowing like a fire, and gleaming like a ruby.
From Guadalajara to Guadalupe
It flies—in flying drops a feather
. . . And the snatching dwarfs stop dancing—and fight
together.

OUT OF THE FLAME

I

FROM my high window,
From my high window in a southern city,
I peep through the slits of the shutters,
Whose steps of light
Span darkness like a ladder.
Throwing wide the shutters
I let the streets into the silent room
With sudden clatter ;
Walk out upon the balcony
Whose curving irons are bent
Like bows about to shoot—
Bows from which the mortal arrows
Cast from dark eyes, dark-lashed
And shadowed by mantillas,
Shall in the evening
Rain down upon men's hearts
Paraded here, in southern climes,
More openly.
But, at this early moment of the day,
The balconies are empty ;
Only the sun, still drowsy-fingered,
Plucks, pizzicato, at the rails,
Draws out of them faint music
Of rain-washed air,
Or, when each bell lolls out its idiot tongue,
When Time lets drop his cruel scythe,
They sing in sympathy.
The sun, then, plucks these irons,
As far below,
That child

Draws his stick along the railings.
The sound of it brings my eye down to him. . . .
Oh heart, dry heart,
It is yourself again !
How nearly are we come together !
If, at this moment,
One long ribbon was unfurled
From me to him,
I should be shown
Above, in a straight line—
A logical growth,
And yet,
 I wave, but he will not look up ;
 I call, but he will not answer.

II

From where I stand
The beauty of the early morning
Suffocates me ;
It is as if fingers closed round my heart.
The light flows down the hills in rivulets,
So you could gather it up in the cup of your hands,
While pools,
The cold eyes of the gods,
Are cradled in those hollows.
Cool are the clouds,
Anchored in the heaven ;
Green as ice are they,
To temper the heat in the valleys
With arches of violet shadow.
You can hear from the distant woods
The thud of the centaurs' hoofs

As they gallop down to drink,
Shatter the golden roofs
Of the trees, for swift as the wind
They gallop down to the brink
Of the waters that echo their laughter,
Cavernous as rolling of boulders down hills;
Lolling, they lap at the gurgling waters.

.

But nearer rises the sound,
Red, ragged as his comb,
Of a cock crowing ;
A bird flies up to me at the window,
Leaping, like music, with regular rhythm,
Sinks down, then, to the city beneath.

III

Below, the ants are hurrying down the footways,
Dressed, here, in bright colours.
Under their various intolerable burdens
They stagger along.
Stop to converse, move, wave their antennæ.

.

The fruit-seller is opening his stall,
Oranges are piled in minute pyramids,
While melons, green melons,
Swing from the roof in string cradles.
The butcher festoons his shop
With swags and gay wreaths of entrails ;
Beautiful heads with horns,
Are nailed up, as on pagan altars,
(Though their ears are fresh from the hearing
Of Orpheus playing his lute).

The Aguador arranges his glasses,
Out of which the sun will strike
His varying scales of crystal music
This afternoon, round the arena.
The Matador prepares for the fight,
Is, indeed, already in the Tavern,
Where later and refreshed with blood,
He will celebrate his triumph
Among the poignant kindling
Of stringéd instruments.

.
—But the child has run away crying;
I call—but no answer comes.

IV

The chatter of the daylight grows
As I look upon the market-place,
Where there is a droning of bag-pipes,
And the hard, wooden music of the hills;
The housewife has left her cottage in the forest,
Driving here through the early tracks of the sun.
The beggars are already at their posts,
Their dry flesh peeps through their garments.
Their old ritual whining
Causes no show of pity.
Why should the hucksters, the busy people notice?
God himself has stood here, out at elbows,
Waiting patiently in the market-place,
While they chatter in gay booths.
But how I fear for them,
These who are not afraid!
I shout to them to make them understand.

They talk more, cease talking and look up,
They all look up, remain gaping.

.
I went back into the water-cool room,
Put on my coloured coat, my buskin,
And mask of Harlequin.
They see me, this time.
“Come on, come on,” they cry,
“You are just in time.
There is fun down here in the market-place.
Two men have been run over,
And there’s to be a public execution.
The gallows are nearly up.
—And after, in the evening,
We will go round the wineshops,
Strumming guitars,
While trills Dolores in her wide, red skirt.
Oh come on, come on !”
—But the paint from my mask runs down
And dyes my clothing.

V

It is not thus in the Northern cities,
Where the cold breathes close to the window-pane,
Where the brittle flowers of the frost
Crackle at the window’s edge.
From my window in the Northern city
I can hear the rattle and roar of the town,
As the carts go lumbering over the bridges,
As the men in dark clothes hurry over the bridges.
They do not parade their hearts here,
They bury them at their lives’ beginning.
They must hurry, or they will be late for their work;

Their work is their bread.
Without bread, how can they work?
They have no time for pleasure,
Nor is work any pleasure to them.
Their faces are masked with weariness,
Drab with their working.
(Only the tramp who moves among them
Unnoticed, despised,
Has eyes that have seen).
They must work till the guns go again,
Giving them their only pretence to glory.
They have no time to fear,
No time to think of an end.
Foolishly I called to them on the bridges;
Only a few stopped, looked up
—But these were convulsed with fury.
Said one to another
“ I have never seen a man
Behave like that before.”
But most of them were mute,
And could not see.

Through the murkiness of the Northern dawn,
The gas already flares out
In the glass palaces,
Where to-night, weary and dulled with smoke and with
drink,
They will seek, in a brief oblivion,
Laughter, and the mask of Ally Sloper.

Thus it is in the Northern cities,
Where the cold lies close to the window-pane,
Where the grass grows its little blades of steel
And the wind is armed with seven whips.

VI

Happy is Orpheus as he plays,
The dumb beasts listen quietly,
The music strokes their downy ears,
Melts the fierce fire within.

Only with music can you tame the beasts,
Break them of their grizzly feasts ;
Only with music can you open eyes to wonder.
But if they will not hear ?
The people have lost faith in music,
Few are there to call, and none to answer.

.

When the Prince kissed the Sleeping Beauty,
He broke the wicked spell of cobwebs ;
She answered, opened her eyes.

When Narcissus looked into the pool,
The cruel waters gave him their reply
—Even that was a better fate
Than to cry out in the lonely night
—And not to be answered.

VII

From my high window in a Southern city,
Floating above the geometrical array
Of roofs, squares and interlacing streets,
One can see beyond
Into far valleys,
That seem at first
To be open blue flowers
Scattered here and there on the mountains.

The forests are so far away,
They creep like humble green moss
Over slopes that are mountains,
And there sounds other music
Than the falling streams,
Or the deep penetrating glow
Of sunlight piercing through green leaves.

VIII

When Orpheus with his wind-swift fingers
Ripples the strings that gleam like rain,
The wheeling birds fly up and sing,
Hither, thither, echoing.
There is a crackling of dry twigs,
A sweeping of leaves along the ground.
Tawny faces and dumb eyes
Peer through the fluttering green screens,
That mask ferocious teeth and claws
Now tranquil.
As the music sighs upon the hills,
The young ones hear,
Come skipping, ambling, rolling down,
Their soft ears flapping as they run,
Their fleecy coats catching in the thickets,
Till they lie, listening, round his feet.

.

Unseen for centuries,
Fabulous creatures creep out of their caverns.
The unicorn
Prances down from his bed of leaves,
His milk-white muzzle still stained green
With the munching, crunching of mountain herbs.

The griffin usually so fierce,
Now tame and amiable again—
Has covered the white bones in his secret cavern
With a rustling pall of dank, dead leaves,
While the Salamander—true lover of art—
Flickers, and creeps out of the flame ;
Gently now, and away he goes,
Kindles his proud and blazing track
Across the forest
—Lies listening,
Cools his fever in this flowing water.

.

When the housewife returns,
Carrying her basket,
She will not understand.
She misses nothing,
Has heard nothing in the woods.
She will only see
That the fire is dead,
The grate cold.

.

But the child left in the empty house
Saw the Salamandar in the flame,
Heard a strange wind, like music, in the forest,
And has gone out to look for it,
Alone.

TWO DANCES

I. COUNTRY DANCE

THE Lion and the Unicorn
Dance now together,
There in the golden corn—
For it is summer weather.

The Lion, seen between the sheaves,
Is more strong than fair,
Yet he lets the singing thieves
Rustle through his tawny hair.

As he treads, the red-gold grain
Curtsies and bows down ;
The birds tear at his ruffled mane,
Stealing seed to feed Troy Town.

For famine, in that fabled land,
Grows, as the years pass.
(Is it golden grain or sand
From a broken hour-glass ?)

Night comes ; over azure ground
Roves an argent breeze :
The Unicorn can still be found
Trampling down the fleur-de-lys.

Elegant and moon-white
As a ghost, the Unicorn
Dances for his own delight
Under the flowering thorn.

While deep in the sleeping wood
The Lion breathes heavily,
Though every dove in each tree coo'd,
Yet would he sleep on wearily.

.

The Unicorn and Lion strong
Dance now together
(But surely they did no wrong—
For it was the summer weather ?)

In among the red-gold grain,
Ankle-deep in the Lilies of France—
And I, for one, could scarce refrain
From joining that heraldic dance.

II. FOX TROT

WHEN SOLOMON MET THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

THE navy at Ezion-Geba
Gazed across the water amazed ;
When Solomon met the Queen of Sheba
Lions in the desert were dazed
With wonder at her striped pavilion
That blazed like a new parhelion ;
They roared their admiration
At this strange coruscation
Till the satyrs
Took their tawny children
Trampling through the sand
To march with the procession, to march with the band.
The flaming phoenix flew with its feathers to fan
The Queen at the head of her caravan ;
But, the phoenix, though famously fabulous,
Was jealous, envious, and emulous
For the Queen of Sheba had a retinue
Strictly in keeping with her revenue—
Six thousand camels and camelopards
Ten thousand and ninety nigger bodyguards.
The camelopards, proud-necked and tall
Would scarcely deign to notice the Queen at all,
But holding their heads as high as zebras
Looked down on a hundred dwarf, harnessed zebras
Bred for their stripes, with such success
That the Queen could play a game of chess
When travelling. The camels kneel
Offer their humps for the Queen to feel,
Nodding arched-necks and plumes of ostrich-feather,
Dyed like her bright Abyssinian weather.

The ten thousand niggers beat on gourds and golden gongs,
Slashing the air with their piebald songs.

.

Thus the Queen met the King of Jerusalem
And he

Seemed wiser

Than Methuselem,

With a great black beard,

And a nose like a scythe,

He lived in the palace,

And subsisted on a tithe !

He gave the Queen of Sheba a welcome ;

Proportionate to her income ;

But this amazing Amazon

Was lovable, generous and free.

She brought a gift to Solomon of cinnamon,

With an Almug and a Nutmeg tree—

These he placed before his palace

For the pleased

Admiration

Of the populace.

Each sweet-smelling branch bore a budding bell of gold

(Oh ! the blood of Israelites ran cold . . .)

When evening-wind blurred the hills with blue

The swinging and the singing of the bells sang true,

These by some magic stratagem

Played the Sheban National Anthem,

While the trill of each bell was like an Abyssinian bird,

Or the golden voice of the Queen—for each word

She spoke, trembled, sparkled in the air,

Then spread its wings, and flew from her.

But the Queen of Sheba went with Solomon

To his country house at Lebanon.

She did not bring him any cedar trees
For these

 Would have been de-trop.
Instead she brought him some Pekoe-trees
In a beautiful Chinese bowl
(For she had a very marked objection to
Endowing Newcastle with coal)
And she brought him gifts of hot-house grapes,
Of ivory,
 Of ebony,
 Of elephants and apes,
Of peacocks, of pearls, and a hundred pygmy slaves
With skins like an orange, and hair that waves,
And each of them wore a turban,
Picked out with the plumes of a pelican,
But of all her gifts, by far the rarest,
Brought from the terrible central forest,
With a vein of gold in its ivory horn,
Was a lovelorn

 Milk-white unicorn ;
 But the King, though sweet as honey,
 Had an eye for the value of money,
So he only gave her a heraldic lion
Embossed with the arms (and nose) of Zion.

Though the Queen of Sheba loved Solomon
She was not happy at Lebanon,
It was not the woman of the Edomites,
The Zidonians,

 The Moabites,
 The Hittites,
 or the Ammonites !

She would even listen to his proverbs, she put up with
very many wrongs—

But in secretly reading his notebook, she found Solomon's
“ Song-of-Songs ”

She knew it at once—it was poetry! And she left The
Palace that day,

But Solomon knew not where she went to nor why she had
roamed away!

But every evening in Jerusalem

The Almug and the Nutmeg trees

Flaunt the Sheban National Anthem

Like a banner on the spice-laden breeze.

And oh! each golden bell

Seemed a turtle-dove

That coo'd

Within the moonlit shadow

Of an Abyssinian wood. . . .

.

But we wonder what she looked like—this fascinating
phantasmagoria. . . .

Atalanta, Gioconda, Semiramis—or the late Queen
Victoria?

TWO GARDEN PIECES

I. NEPTUNE IN CHAINS

ENSLAVED are the old Gods ;
Pan pipes soundlessly
For the unheeding bees.

Bound by the trailing tresses of the vine
To soft captivity,
Neptune has left his waves
To stand beneath the frozen, green cascades
Of summer trees.

Is the Sea-God, then, content to rule
The rippling of wayward flowers,
Lulled by the songs that many birds pour out
From their green-cradles, gently-rocked
—Songs that foam like hissing rain
Among the heavy blossoms ?
Can he control
The music of the wind through poplar trees,
—Those trees, an instrument
That any wind, however young
Or drunk with drowsing scent
Of petals, crushed by the flaming fingers of the sun
Can play upon ?

But darkness, the deliverer
Comes with dreams.
Night's grape-stained waves
Cool his aching body—
The song of the nightingale

Falls round him
Like the froth of little waves ;
The warm touch of the evening wind
Thaws the green cascades
Till you can hear
Every liquid sound within the world
—Fountains, falling waterfalls,
And the low murmur of the rolling sea
—And Neptune dreams that he is free.

II. FOUNTAINS

PROUD fountains, wave your plumes,
Spread out your phoenix-wing,
Let the tired trees rejoice
Beneath your blossoming
(Tired trees, you whisper low).

High up, high up, above
These green and drooping sails,
A fluttering young wind
Hovers and dives—but fails
To steal a foaming feather.

Sail, like a crystal ship,
Above your sea of glass ;
Then, with your quickening touch,
Transmute the things that pass
(Come down, cool wind, come down).

All humble things proclaim,
Within your magic net,
Their kinship to the Gods.
More strange and lovely yet
All lovely things become.

Dead, sculptured stone assumes
The life from which it came ;
The kingfisher is now
A moving tongue of flame,
A blue, live tongue of flame—

While birds, less proud of wing,
Crouch, in wind-ruffled shade,
Hide shyly, then pour out,
Their jealous serenade ;
. . . Close now your golden wings !

PARADE

WHILE vapour rises, the sun shines along
A promenade beneath tall trees. In vain
Seek thirsting flowers to thread their crystal song
Upon the liquid harpstrings of the rain.

Sweet air is honey'd with the lulling sound
Of bees, gold-dusted. In the avenue
Each leaf is now a lens the sun has found
To focus light, and cast green shadow through

Where walks Zenobia. Her marmoset
Perched on the shoulder, grabs at ribbon'd flowers
Or youthful curls of elders. Etiquette
Is outraged, and a dowager glowers.

The Marmoset plays with Zenobia's curls,
Clutches the papillon's enamel'd sail ;
Gesticulates with idiot hands ; unfurls,
Then counts, the piebald rings upon his tail.

Here flutter fan and feather to and fro
As eager birds caressing golden sheaves ;
And like the spray of fountains, when winds blow
The froth of laughter foams among the leaves,

Till music, thin as silver wire, uncoils
—Metallic trap to trip unwary players—
A tune, ringed like the monkey's tail ; but foils
Any attempt to straighten it—In layers

The idlers pause to watch the stage, where leap
These masked buffoons to which the Old Gods sank.

Over her fan Zenobia may peep
At the lewd gestures of a mountebank.

The silent lime-trees drip their golden scent ;
Staccato shrills the puppet, waves a wand,
Postures, exaggerates a sentiment. . . .
The little ape, alone, may understand

How men make Gods, and place them up above ;
Then clamber up themselves to throw God down,
Dearly pay deities for former love ;
We hold them captive, make them play the clown.

Who knows but that, one day, men may be bound
Thus to make war or love for apeish laughter,
Until the world of gibbering monkeys round
Quiver with laughter at our ape-like slaughter ?

.

Ends song and antic ; players quit the stage
To the gloved silence of genteel applause,
Splutters El Capitan in Spanish rage,
Curses his money. Swathed in quiet, like gauze,

The World is still, until a breeze sets free
Green leaves, with plucking sound of mandoline.
Convulsed the monkey capers—seems to see
The wind, that wingéd God and Harlequin.

Who, flying down, sounds waters' silver strings
And brings soft music from far trembling towers,
Snatches a bird-bright feather for his wings
And flickers light on many secret flowers.

ENGLISH GOTHIC

ABOVE the valley floats a fleet
Of white, small clouds. Like castanets
The corn-crakes clack ; down in the street
Old ladies air their canine pets.

The bells boom out with grumbling tone
To warn the people of the place
That soon they'll find, before His Throne,
Their Maker, with a frowning face.

.

The souls of bishops, shut in stone
By masons, rest in quietude
As flies in amber. They atone
Each buzzing long-dead platitude.

For lichen plants its golden flush
Here, where the gaiter should have bent ;
With glossy wings the black crows brush
Carved mitres, caw in merriment.

Wings blacker than a verger's hat
Beat on the air. These birds must learn
Their preaching note by pecking at
The lips of those who, treading fern,

Ascend the steps to Heaven's height.
—The willow herb, down by the wood,
Flares out to mark the phoenix-flight
Of God Apollo's car. Its hood

Singes the trees. The swans who float
—Wings whiter than the foam of sea—
Up the episcopal smooth moat,
Uncurl their necks to ring for tea.

.

At this sign, in the plump green close,
The Deans say grace. A hair pomade
Scents faded air. But still outside
Stone bishops scale a stone façade.

A thousand strong, church-bound, they look
Across shrill meadows—but to find
The cricket bat defeats the Book
—Matter triumphant over Mind !

Wellington said Waterloo
Was won upon the playing-fields,
Which thought might comfort clergy who
Admire the virtues that rank yields.

But prelates of stone cannot relate
An Iron Duke's strong and silent words.
The knights in armour rest in state
Within, and grasp their marble swords.

Above, where flutter angel-wings
Caught in the organ's rolling loom,
Hang in the air, like jugglers' rings,
Dim quatrefoils of coloured gloom.

Tall arches rise to imitate
The jaws of Jonah's whale. Up flows
The chant. Thin spinsters sibilate
Beneath a full-blown Gothic rose.

Pillars surge upward, break in spray
Upon the high and fretted roof ;
But children scream outside—betray
The urging of a cloven hoof.

.

Tier above tier the Bishops stare
Away, away, . . . above the hills ;
Their faded eyes repel the glare
Of dying sun, till sunset fills

Each pointed niche, in which they stand,
With glory of earth ; humanity
Is spurned by one, with upturned hand,
Who warns them all is vanity.

The swan beneath the sunset arch
Expands his wings, as if to fly.
A thousand saints upon the march
Glow in the water, . . . but to die.

A man upon the hill can hear
The organ. Echoes he has found
That, having lost religious fear,
Are pagan ; till the rushing sound

Clearly denotes Apollo's car,
That roars past moat and bridge and tree,
The Young God sighs. How far, how far,
Before the night shall set him free ?

THE BACKWARD CHILD

ASLEEP, asleep with closéd eyes
In the womb of time, King Pharaoh lies ;
Heavy the darkness is, as rust,
On the cold sword he holds ; while dust
Muffles the mocking panoply
With quilted silence, dead and grey.
Here any wandering sound would skim
The sleep off silence, to wake him
Till under the too-smooth mask of gold
Old parchment wrinkles would unfold,
His green and ice-bound limbs expand,
The dead flowers blossom in dead hand ;
But comes no sound, save the flitting scowl
Of death-wingéd bat, or vault-voiced owl,
No sound through the ages all forlorn,
Unless a padding unicorn
Obscures his treasure, ivory white,
In the Egyptian grape-blue night ;
Curling his limbs to rest, untangles
His milky mane, while moon-sharp angles
Of pyramids enfold him close
In their defiant, calm repose—
For their harsh angularity
Defeats the hunter's cruelty. . . .

.

No padding unicorn is this
To prick the Old King's nothingness,
Yet a movement woke, a faint sound stirred
The silence, like a spoken word

No soft night sound, nor anything
But rolling laughter echoing.

.

Then King Pharaoh stretched, stood up, with a smile
Touched the crowns of the Upper and Lower Nile.
Like the jewels in his crown, had grown more deep
His gypsy eyes in embalméd sleep,
While out of the golden sockets came
A very living, curious flame.
He dashed the gold mask on the floor,
His dry limbs creaked toward the door,
And out of it thrust his nodding head,
A pendulum to count the dead,
—For there below in the lion-coloured sand
Salome danced the Sarabande!

.

With ruffled plumage, the sun flashed its wing
On a double-crowned, parchment-yellow king.
The clear bronze sides of the pyramids
Shone like polished coffin-lids,
Each side a huge triangular mirror
To magnify each separate terror,
To heighten the shadows, to enhance
How dead was the king, how alive the dance,
Till ashamed the wicked echoes hid
Like bats in the depth of the pyramid,
Or hid far-off in the honey-comb hive
Of caves, where the bearded hermits live.

.

Serapion-the-Sidonite
Turned from the strange unholy sight.
Left his cave, went up the hill

Where aged Anthony dwells still.
Disturbed in prayer, St. Anthony,
Looks round, recalls a century ;
Yet in that whole tempestuous age
Had beheld never such a mirage
(Not even when with book and bell
He cleansed the hill he loves so well
—That hill of Venusberg, whose name
The poor vile heathen still proclaim)
Led by two Bishops, with his high crook,
The old saint summons round his flock.
They, hour by hour, together read
The paternoster and the creed,
While Christian choirs of shrill-birds bless
The Saint's white-bearded holiness.

.

Below the heathen nightingales,
Embalm, within their seven veils
Of song, Salome—swathings fine
Scented with fountain, rose and vine—
Tired Pharaoh falls back in his box ;
The lid snaps down. The golden flocks
Of stars browse round the singing trees
And orchards of Hesperides.
Down here no sound, except forlorn
Sad padding of the unicorn
Who seeks a refuge from the snare
Of cruel hunters ; lurking here
His horn, his mane, his shape are hid
In slumber of the pyramid.
Safe here is he ; for in this place
Hide every legendary race ;

Saints, satyrs, unicorns, entrance
Us with their fabulous elegance ;
And Pharaoh himself sits up to tea
Under the shade of the incense tree . . .
Yet nomads, wandering, will find
No tree, no murmur, no soft wind !

NURSERY RHYME

THE ROCKING-HORSE

GENTLE hills hold on their lap
Cloud-rippled meadows where tall trees sigh.
The round pool catches in her lap
Greenness of tree and breadth of sky.

The mottled thrush that sings, serene,
Of English worm in English lane,
Is left behind. We change the scene
For jungle or for rolling plain.

I rock the children, carry them
On wooden waves that creak like me,
From Joppa to Jerusalem
Or to a far Cerulean sea,

Where flutter winds that bear the balm
And breathing of a million flowers
That nod beneath a feathery palm ;
Where dusky figures, in cool bowers

Of fretted coral, singing, swim
—Forget the missionary who wishes
To make them chant a British hymn
And hide their nakedness from fishes.

.

Within the limits of this stride
I can encompass any space ;
Time's painted gates are open wide,
The Old Gods give me their embrace.

Now off to Babylon we trot
To see the hanging gardens, where
Tree, trailing vine and mossy grot
Show proudly in the upper air

Above the shifting evening throng,
Like giant galleons with full sails ;
These streams have robbed their crystal song
From honey-throated nightingales.

We've watched the Roman legions pass
—The Tower of Babel, waver . . . fall ;
We've stroked the wooden horse that was
The hidden breach in great Troy's wall.

Softly the rainbow Pantaloon,
Slinks down night's alley. (Oh ! how still is
The evening on this wide lagoon,
Where palaces like water-lilies

Float palely in the trembling peace
Of stars and little waves.) Sails past
Jason, who stole the golden fleece
To nail it high above his mast. . . .

. . . . In Toad-stool Farm we're back again ;
See how the fat and dappled cow
Crouches in buttercups ; come rain,
To make the green lush meadows grow !

TWO MYTHOLOGICAL POEMS

I. THE JEALOUS GODDESS

SILENUS left the mainland
On a floating barrel of wine,
His sail was plaited from peach-leaves, and
The leaves of the fig and vine.
Small waves seemed masks of laughter
As they rose at Silenus agape,
For his feet were purple with the slaughter
And the crushing of the Phœnix-blooded grape.
But the little golden winds of the autumn
Flew with him all the way,
Like a fleecy flock of Seraphim
They waited on him all the day—
When the Syren swam to sing to him
From her island where the dolphins play,
They pelted her with lemons and with persimmon
Till the Syren dived away.
They blew down silver trumpets to summon
Sea-monsters that peer from the spray.

But the sound of seraphic hunting-horn
Brayed to the nearing golden strand,
Till each ogre, dragon, giant and unicorn
Sprang from his cave, to guard his land
—This dear, dear land of Venus
Where the hippogriff and griffin play!
For if the Syren sang to Silenus
What would Jealous Venus say?

II. BACCHANALIA

“ . . . From over-indulgence in wine, and
other dietetic peccadilloes.”

BAEDEKER'S "Southern Italy."

WHERE little waves claw the golden grapes,
Springing at the terraced hills like lions,
Where pirates swagger in earrings and black-capes
And the roses and the lilies grow like dandelions,
Silenus, I regret to say, sat
On an empty, purple vat,
(And his life-long love, the Lady Venus
Had left for Olympus, shocked at Silenus).

The Syren's voice, like a golden bee,
Trembles through the leaves of each lemon tree,
Winging, like a bird, from her island grove
It brought Silenus a message of love ;
But, as, rather helpless, he heard the Syren's song
He felt that his behaviour was material—was wrong,
He tore the tinted vine-leaves from his tousled hair
Shouted for his satellites, dragged them from their lair,
Mentioned, most severely, the iniquities of drink
(Though his speech came thick and indistinct) ;
But his followers were angry, woken out of sleep,
Recalled to him that the sea was deep,
That if it was water he really would prefer,
And the singing of the Syren, he could go to look for her !
But, Silenus, though pink and fat,
Was strong, for the matter of that . . .
He fought like a lion, and bellowed like a seal,
But he had filled his followers with missionary zeal,
They swung him high, and swung him low,
Then threw him (plomp) where the salt waves blow.

The syren stopped her singing at a piteous cry,
Saw a spout of water mounting hundreds of feet high,
And Jonah aboard a neighbouring sail,
Sang “ Yo-ho, yo-ho, I spy a whale ! ”

BOOK II

SING PRAISES

SATIRES

EXPLANATION

SUBTLETY OF THE SERPENT

“Now the serpent was more
subtil than any beast of
the field which the Lord
God had made.”

GENESIS iii. 1.

THROUGH the green masses of the undergrowth,
Pools of silent water,
Where float large flowers and patches of white light,
Crawls the serpent, subtle, sad,
And tired of well-doing.
Nevermore will he help humanity.
Venomously he hisses at the Cherubim
Whose flaming sword sears the Heavens,
A sword whose flame turns every way
To keep the path of the Tree-of-Life.
A tropic spring, this first one,
With leaves like spears and banners ;
But the ground is sweet with fallen petals
Of great blossoms
That heave their hot breath at the droning insects.
The air is full of the twittering of birds,
Whose innocence appeals to Adam
—Already outside the garden—
While, high up in their swaying green cradles
The monkeys carry on their high-pitched chatter.

The serpent reasoned thus—
“ For long time have I been at war
With the ape-tribe ;
Small apes with clutching hands,

Great apes (how hideous they are !)
Whom the God-of-Man
Has made in the image of Man.
They tried to kill me :
I tried to kill them.
But Adam and Eve deceived me,
Looking scornfully at the great apes,
They pretended to a difference.
For a long time I loved them,
Fascinated by their words,
By their story of the Creation—
But now, O Lord,
Give me a good old-fashioned ape
Every time
—An ape who tries to kill me
Without a chatter of clean-hands, law-and-order,
Crime passionel,
Self-defence or helping-me-to-help-myself.
I may be a snake in the grass,
But I am not a hypocrite.
I may change my skin,
But I am not ashamed of it.
I have never pretended to be a super-snake
Or to walk except on my belly—

.

It is not only the ignorance of good or evil
That raises the monkey above the man
(Though the man knows evil and therefore prefers it),
But the fact that the monkey
Cannot yet disguise the good with bad words,
Or the bad with good ones.

.

Never before have I been cursed ;
But man has made his God
Curse me with black words.
Now, therefore,
Will I curse Mankind.

—Man shall know good, but shall not act on it.
He shall know good, and turn it to evil purpose.
His twin curses shall be words and knowledge ;
I, the snake, know a thing-or-two ;
I know that man is a self-made monkey,
—And he knows it too !
But he will disguise it
With a God of his making,
A blustering God, a revengeful God,
A God who curses the Serpent
With sophistry, subtlety, and—words.
But I know that Man is still
An ape at heart,
A talkative chattering ape.
His curiosity shall discover many strange secrets,
But he will use them
For his two recreations,
Lying and killing,
Or—as he calls them—
Conversation and Sport.
His words shall girdle a continent
Swiftly, as a flash of fire ;
They shall be written down,
Every day,
For millions of men to read
—But they will still be lies—black lies !
Men shall journey the world over
To kill the beasts of the field, the forest and jungle ;
He shall kill them secretly, without their knowing

As with a thunder-bolt :
But his own kind
Will he kill in millions,
Slaughter and butcher
With the last refinements of torture.
—And words, words,
Shall be the cause and end of it.”

As the serpent crawled away on his belly
Through the silent waters of the undergrowth,
He heard two sharp voices,
Outside the garden.

“ You did ”—“ I didn’t.”

“ You did ”—“ I didn’t.”

—“ It was the serpent.”

A long silence, and then the second act,
When the brutal voice of the first statesman
Roared out
“ Am I my brother’s keeper ? ”

DE LUXE

"The Presence, that rose thus
so strangely beside the waters, is
expressive of what in the ways
of a thousand years man had
come to desire."—*Walter Pater.*

MRS. FREUDENTHAL CONSULTS THE WITCH OF ENDOR

A NOSE, however aquiline,
Escapes detection in a throng ;
So she hopes ; but sense of sin
Made her shrink and steal along

Streets glazed by mocking summer heat
To semblance of a cool canal,
Where iridescent insects beat
Their wings upon the liquid wall,

Where radiant insects, carrion-fed,
Buzz and flutter busily,
Smile, or frown, or nod the head,
Expressing some familiar lie.

Enter the house, ascend the stair !
Consult the scintillating ball ;
Beatrice Freudenthal, beware !
Eve felt like you before the Fall.

Within the shining mystic globe,
Lies luck at bridge, or martyr's crown ;
A modern prophetess will probe
The future—for one guinea down.

For that amount the future's sword
From crystal scabbard she will drag ;
She can unpack the future's hoard,
As we unpack a Gladstone bag.

Without the agency of Man,
Solely by fasting and by prayer,
The wizards of Old Jenghiz Khan
Could move a wine cup through the air

Until it reached him ; then he drank,
Fermented juice of rye or grape ;
The cup flew back, his courtiers shrank
Away, astonished and agape.

Before the Lama turns to grapple
With State-Affairs, he learns to spin
(Despite Sir Isaac Newton's apple),
In mid-air, sixty times—to win

Amusement mixed with approbation
From sceptical ambassadors,
For any kind of levitation
Increases prestige with the Powers !

Such things were practised—did not tend
To promote war or anarchy
—Yet now such things would even end
A Constitutional Monarchy.

NIGHT THOUGHTS

MAGIC for a holy race
Is surely wrong? How strictly hidden
The future, in its crystal case,
Lies packed—so near and yet forbidden!

Though Gentile Kings upon their thrones
May weave a spell, or dance like Tich,
Yet ponder on the bleaching bones
Of Saul, who sought the Endor Witch.

Now Mrs. Freudenthal has heard her call
Without a qualm—yet how can she obey
The bidding of the prophetess (like Saul,
She has consulted Endor)? How can she

Aspire to feed the lions, yet unlike Daniel,
Once there insist on resting in their den,
To treat them as one would a King Charles Spaniel
With frowns—with bones and biscuits, now and then?

For Mrs. Freudenthal is weary of
Her auction-bridge and hissing hotel-friend,
Seeks spheres where Novelist and Romanoff
Eat with Artistic Ladies without end.

Money is power—a golden pedestal
Atones for beauty that is long, long dead—
As Orpheus, Mrs. Kinfoot has enchanted all,
The lions who have not thundered—and then fled.

Thus climbing sideways, you entice a throng
Of Artists with a biscuit and a bone—
Then use them as a bait, step up a rung—
But how begin ? At night she plans alone

Within the saxe-blue hotel drawing-room,
The silence of South Kensington is deep,
No sound except the traffic's wave-like boom
—And Mrs. Kinfoot climbing in her sleep !

Thus Mrs. Freudenthal, alone, awake,
And sad, broods on. Oh how, oh how begin ?
Till suddenly she melts—as small waves break,
So laughter ripples to her fortieth chin.

For now she has it—clasps the golden key
That shall unbar that stranger—Popularity.
How many noses are forgiven thee,
Forgotten, in the name of Charity ?

First fill the coffers of the Sacred Cause,
And then the stomachs of the well-to-do,
Now Mrs. F. . . . will be their Santa Klaus
—Until herself becomes a War-horse too.

THE WAR-HORSE CHANTS

WAS there war once,
I have forgotten it !
Was there war once ?
—War means more trade.

Poor Lady X
Has given up her motor-car,
Poor Lady Y
Has shut up her house.

Was there war once ?
I have forgotten it.
Was there war once ?
—Now food is here.

Now I remember
How much I suffered—
Very bad form
To mention the war.

Such dreadful suffering
Injures my appetite—
All these brave men
Dying for me—

Was there war once ?
Yes, I remember it.
Was there . . . was once . . . ?

A TOUCH OF NATURE

TRAINED to a charm of manner, to a smile
—Enamelled and embalmed by Madame Rose
(Shame that an artist of this skill, this style,
Can never sign her work), no War-Horse shows

Any emotion. The poor Spartan Youth
Though the fox gnawed his entrails, would not cry ;
These never wince, nor hurl the mirror at Truth,
Though Old Age disembowel them secretly.

Throughout the day, blue shadows in the valley
Hover, crouch down, till dusk will let them rend
The last light on the hills ; so wrinkles rally
To overwhelm them at their sudden end—

For Death strikes at the Old as well as Young,
And these—and these—may die at balls or races,
Or living death may make them loll the tongue,
Twitching in doll-like, hideous grimaces.

The very dab of rouge, that ghastly shred
Of self-respect, makes worse the look so winning
Of eyes—dead eyes—that know quite well they're dead—
And yet retain a certain childish cunning.

And each day till the end, is dragged along
This painted bundle, trundled in its tomb,
Toward the sea where wondering children throng,
Mocked by this mask, this nodding lisp of doom

That almost apes them—save the open eye
Which contradicts the mouth, and knows the matter,
This terrible eye that moans “ I die, I die,”
While the poor slobbering mouth can only chatter.

Then other War-horses pause, nod, go past,
—A few months younger these—and laugh together—
(She, too, was hard and bold), nor note how fast
An egret’s wing becomes a funeral feather.

They laugh and mutter, make their little jokes,
—And wonder if her lover had been bored
“ Look at the poor old thing ! ”
 The dumb voice chokes ;
The eye is open yet—each word a sword !

YOUTH AT THE PROW, AND PLEASURE AT THE HELM

BATTISTA SFORZA, led by unicorns,
Triumphant, ever set in amber light
By Piero, yet keeps her course ; adorns
Her empty palace, still, that floating height

Where Raphael was born—Isotta's name,
Near-by, still, rose-like, clambers through the gloom
Of Malatesta's temple, built to fame
His pagan love, half pleasure-house, half tomb.

Then, even tyrants drunk with blood and pride,
And ever vaunting poison-cup and knife,
No less than angels beauty made ; they died,
But Art, their pleasure, still extols their life.

Thus power, thus gold, sought pleasure in the past
But wooed her strangely, in a different mood
—As Pallas or Minerva—things that last,
Carved both in mind and heart, in stone and wood.

Now many palaces and Tuscan towns
Crumble upon a half-deserted hill,
Slowly their stone surrenders to the flowers ;
The drip and flowing of their fountains fill

The night with cool—the night that is alive
With chanting frog and owl and nightingale ;
Who knows but that these things may yet contrive
To please, when tank and war-memorial fail ?

Gonzaga, D'Este, Medici are gone,
Or dreary sons approach their unnoticed fall,
Top-hatted, leave a beauty-hating throne
To fawn upon a Mrs. Freudenthal,

Or find their pleasure at a football match
—Express a dullard similarity
To other ox-eyes—lifting up the latch
Upon a similar vulgarity.

For pleasure, too, is old ; has lost her realm,
—Degraded to a mumbling hag—for now
Stands Golf—for pleasure—at an armoured helm,
The Cenotaph—for Youth—at iron prow !

Yet never cruelty reaped such vast reward
As in these latter days, and with such ease,
When the whole world became a slaughter-yard
And stank with crime, and reeked with foul disease.

—No crime of passion—only crime for gold,
Or crimes of rulers drunk with their stupidity ;
The people walk with faces deathly cold,
Or marked and masked with their cupidity.

But Mrs. Freudenthal knows her own mind,
And means to follow up and win the game,
Seek pleasure with the others of her kind,
Who live and die alike, and share the same

Ideals. A horse has focussed in its eyes
Exaggerated visions of its rider,

So Mrs. Freudenthal now magnifies
A War-horse's importance—like a spider

She weaves her web, while brain and heart both burn
To join their ranks, to rally to their banner ;
Beside the feeding of them, she must learn
To ape the face, the smile, the talk, the manner !

THE MANNER

ALLOW no personality to stamp
Its wayward lines upon your talk or dress ;
Smooth out your facial furrows, on them clamp
The necessary look of nothingness.

You must acquire a careful conversation
Remember that War-horses of True Breed
Only feel interest—if ever—in relation
To other ones—and, never, never read !

Know though the names of authors, and conceivably
The names of their most fashionable book ;
But never talk too far, or irretrievably
You blunder on the crafty fisher's hook.

Then music, as a rule, you love too well
To wish to hear. But if you go, you walk
About—if not too loud, it helps to swell
The frankly social impulse toward talk.

You simply love the Opera, and force
Your way in late, and romp from cage to cage ;
The prima-donna is a well-known War-horse
Who fills the heart, the ear, the house, the stage !

If you see modern pictures, in their glass
Ecstatically examine the old strife
Between your food and figure—should he pass,
Discuss with friends the painter's private life.

Though, safety-first, you find it really best
To cast your rapture on the gilded air,
When you find pictures dead, but smartly drest,
Within the mansion of a millionaire.

Still you encourage those whom you can hire
To fix on canvas, for the future race
Of War-horses to simper at—admire,
The painted image of your painted face.

And any artist, author, or musician,
—If second-rate—is useful as a bait
To fish for guests—remember words like “Titian ”
“—Shakespeare ” “—Mozart,” let go—and trust to
Fate

To pull you through—avoid ideas—they’re common
And might crack through the varnish of your smile,
Impinge upon your worship of God Mammon
Filling your soul with pity, and things vile.

THE OPEN DOOR

A light, within her glassy car, betrays
Folding of chins beneath the aquilinity
Of heavy curling features, and displays
A likeness to Assyrian Divinity.

When comes the dusk, life's cloak is thrown aside ;
The yellow windows shout their nakedness . . .
Until again the weary buildings hide
Their throb and stir with usual drab blackness.

So, now, swooped darkness down ; outside, each lamp
Showed the raw-fingers of the winter night
Clutching squat horses, torn by dirt and damp,
Like mouldering cardboard boxes ; each small light

Within, exposed a section harsh and shrill
Of life, cut off as the next scene succeeded
—A broken chair, a figure standing still,
A withered plant—mean drama that, unheeded,

Flashes its image on the world's dark screen
But for a moment—yet the play goes on,
Vibrates through worlds—to mingle in a scene
Of final war or crime, or revolution ;

But though finite to us, this act of blood
Is meaningless, when flashed on outer dark
Of whirling planets, though a curious God
Might for the moment, notice a vague mark.

Again we make God in the image of Man
—Imagine God has made us in His image—
Reigns Law-and-Order for another span
To crush the weak in mad ferocious rage.

The wise, poor tight-rope dancers, walk again
The thin-drawn wire of art and thought, out-thrust
A hand to catch the comet's golden rain,
Whose blossom fades within their arms to dust.

Can man be falling once more through the black
Æons of hunger, ignorance and shame?
—But Mrs. Freudenthal pursues her track,
Intent upon it, means to win the game.

Houses rush past her—but she does not see,
Her eyes are glazed, until with clarity
She notes the War-horses drawn up for tea
Outside the glittering home of Charity.

Upstairs, bedecked with plumes, their minds they rest
On music and on muffins—all for sake
Of Charity; the music gives a zest
To whispered conversation—if awake,

Yet silent, the unwelcome harmony
May cause the facial scaffolding to fall;
They lower safety-curtains o'er each eye,
And move uneasily within each stall,

For music has a strange, unwelcome power
Of smearing sentiment about the mouth

Like children, after eating jam, they glower
In heavy, stupefaction—cross, uncouth.

The car arrives, the open door,
Expels a scorching flood of light—
The noise outside dies down—the floor
Is slippery and very bright.

INTRODUCING

IT takes a camel thirty days
To cross the sinister sand of Lop
Whose Bedouin chants Allah's praise
Without cessation, dare not stop.

Though unaware of the subtle danger
Of buried learning, of civilisation,
He feels himself on his guard—a stranger
With Ignorance as his true Salvation.

Unknown to him beneath the extent
Of ashen sand, old Gods lie hidden
With frozen gesture, ears intent
On sounds forgotten and forbidden.

—For muttering of muted bell
Swells music from the nightingales
Whose crystal gurglings excel
The singing streams that formed these vales

So fruitfully luxuriant still
To eyes closed like a curving sword
—Though now no sound save droning thrill
Of shifting sand is ever heard.

Yet of an influence here felt
Tradition tells the Bedouin.
Into grey sand the mirages melt.
Spell the Arab's road to ruin.

On through the dusk he hears his name
Called, then repeated—seek he must
That voice which calls, like wealth or fame
Only to lead from dust to dust ;

Or death may come through the burning night
With the drumming of a multitude,
For the Devil revels in the sight
Of death in the desert solitude.

Though the camel can kneel, he never prays
Careless if God or Devil is near,
Stoutly he bears his burden of days
With Seven Stomachs—and no fear.

Yet Infant Samuel in the Old Priest's house
When darkness drowned him with its shadowy torrent
Felt fear at hearing his own name (who knows
But that he changed it after—by Royal Warrant ?)

Mrs. Freudenthal, irate,
Decides to diet, to get thin.
Everyone must deprecate
Decay of manners. With no chin

The arrogant yet gluttonous camel
Never shows satiety ;
Would rather rest in asphodel
Than figure in Society,

But Mrs. Kinfoot, spotting a new head
To add to her collection—grasps her hand,
And Mrs. Freudenthal is gently led
Within the portals of the Promised Land.

MALGRÉ SOI

THE voices weave a web of futile sound ;
A fan is dropped by Lady Carabas ;
Restored to her : but Mrs. Kinfoot frowned,
Guarding the door, as Cerberus his pass.

But suddenly, great waves of sound obtrude
Upon the pleasant party in this room ;
While we enjoy the music's interlude,
Outside there swells the trumpet-call of doom.

Mosaic tombs or unmarked graves—asunder
Are rent. King Dodon rises from the dead
And while the quivering heavens thunder,
He smooths his robe, then calmly shakes his head

Free of the ages' dust—but now the voices
Of these condemned (for judgment will not tarry)
Shrill out in woe ; but one, alone, rejoices,
For Mrs. Kinfoot scents another quarry.

The Army of the Dead are on the march
To meet their Maker on his ivory throne ;
He sits beneath the rainbow's radiant arch,
Dispensing judgment. Oh ! atone, atone !

But Mrs. Kinfoot saw a sailor-sinner *
—With one arm—leave St. Paul's and walk away
And Mrs. Kinfoot longed to give a dinner
To meet the Judge upon the Judgment day !

* Editor's note : Lord Nelson (?).

Above God's head a dozen suns kept guard
Like sentinels. Her erring feet were led
Up to a crowded mount, where God's regard
Was fixed upon her, while He gravely said :

“ Anne Kinfoot, worthy mother, and good wife,
Your weakness and your faults are all forgiven ;
Go you, my child, to everlasting life,
And take your husband, also, up to Heaven.”

But she could see the Counsellors and Kings
And brilliant bearers of a famous name,
Tangled with snakes and horrid crawling things
Sent down to torture and eternal flame.

Then Mrs. Kinfoot lied in agony : “ Oh, Lord,
I am as others of my class and station,”
She cried, “ Oh, have me bound, and burnt and gored
Oh ! send me down to suffer my damnation.

I swear I beat my children ! ” Oh, despondent
She was ; “ I am a sinner. I will tell
How I escaped a Ducal Co-respondent
Last year—my God—I must insist on—Hell.

But the Great Judge was not deceived—He knew
The worthy virtue of the Kinfoot line ;
Yet as she went to Heaven, constant, true
To principle, she murmured, “ Will you dine

To meet . . . ” but dragged away, she dwells on high
And notes, but rather disapproves the eccentricity
Of Saints and Early Christians, who try
To lessen the burden of her domesticity.

She has to play upon a golden harp,
Join in the chorus of the heavenly choir ;
Her answers to the Saints are sometimes sharp,
She longs to singe her wings, and share the fire.

Night never comes, so when she tries to flee
To that perpetual party down below,
The angels catch her, shouting out with glee,
“ Dear Mrs. Kinfote—you are good ! —— We know ! ”

PARADISE REGAINED

POOR Mrs. Kinfoot closed her wings, leant out
From the Gold Bar of Heaven,
Shed tears, like icicles, to flout
Hell's suffering, to leaven

The Torment of the Upper Ten—
—Or was it because now and then

She heard the glad hilarious cries,
(A party down below again)
Till tears formed in her jungle-eyes
For torture she could not attain ?

Or heard the strains that she adored
—Not martyrs seeking the Lost Chord

As here, nor Heber's hints of ire—
But Russian Music, for the latter
Was sent down to eternal fire
To promote fashionable chatter,

Which, as on earth, when music sounds
E'en torture cannot keep in bounds.

And Jacob's ladder, as she leans
Invites escape ; with deep delight
She recollects what " climbing " means !
—But angels guard her day and night,

Or rather day and day, because
Eternal glory never thaws

To dusk—again strange music blares
Its strangled message through all space,
While, lit by multi-coloured flares,
Hell's blackness gains a certain grace.

.

“ Oh, Heaven is dull,” cried Mrs. Kinfoot, “ dull ! ”
—And then the Gold Bar snap'd
—And like a bull

She charged the universe full-tilt. The roseate domes
The golden minarets, the opal towers
Of Heaven speed above, while hot wind foams
About her, seems to wither them like flowers.

Old Jacob climbing up his Freudian stair
Bowed down with age—is taken unaware,

Slithers, then falls—but, like a shooting-star,
Falls Mrs. Kinfoot past him. As she spins,
Hell's legions stop to watch her, though still far
Away, chant gladly “ Mrs. Kinfoot wins !

Can you consign to everlasting flame
The Woman who beats Jacob at his game ? ”

And oh ! the people, oh ! the parties here !
Musician, Author, Artist, Aristocrat !
Dear Lady Carabas, with Mr. Queer ;
The Cosmopolitan Marquise, with that

Old Duchess of St. Dodo, whose tiara
Is made of snakes and scorpions—they are a

Present from the Devil, whose assistance
She claimed on earth—Himself now welcomes in
The new arrival, saying “ For Persistence
You have no equal, so, though free from Sin,

We here create you Honorary Member,
Beginning from the Fifth day of November,

(A Saint’s day here).” Now authors and Debrett
Mingle their laughing tears to music’s swell,
For here are some whom she has never met
—And Mrs. Kinfoot finds her Heaven in Hell !

FIVE PORTRAITS AND A GROUP

I. THE GENERAL'S WIFE REFUSES

IT isn't that I don't like them,
My dear Mrs. Kinfoot,
But I know
I am not clever,
And I like your old friends best.

As for the General
He disapproves of Art,
And does not believe in it.
He has noticed
That Artists
Have an odd look in their eyes,
And a shifty expression.
In fact,
The General disapproves of Art.

He finds that Artists
Are stupid
And difficult to talk to—
He remembers meeting one
In '97
Who was not interested
In Polo,
—And appeared
To be unaware of the existence
Of the old Duke of Cambridge.

My husband didn't get angry,
He just said to him, like that,

“What are you interested in?
ART, I suppose?”

In spite of this
The General thinks
That music is more dangerous
—And subversive of discipline
Than painting—
For—in painting—
That is to say
In good painting—
You can see put down on canvas
What you can see yourself—
—And you can touch it
With your finger—
A picture should be the same
As a coloured photograph,
Except that the camera
Reveals things
Invisible to the Human Eye;
That is wrong!
(By the Human Eye
The General says
He means
His own eye)
But in Music
You can see nothing,
And you are unable
To touch it
With your fingers;
The General disapproves of Art,
—But it makes him positively nervous
To hear music.

The General says that,
As far as he can make out,
All musicians
Have been German—
But he can only remember
The name of one—
Nietzsche !
As the war
Was German in origin,
It is obvious that it was made
By German Composers
And *not*
By German Generals
—Many of whom were fine fellows
Who loved a good joke.
The General remembers one
Who laughed like anything
At one of his stories.
The war was made by German musicians
—Just as surely
As our own
Pacific and imaginative policy
Was interpreted
By Kipling and Lady Butler.

“Never trust a Man
Who plays the piano,”
The General says.
He thinks that
In the main,
The British have a sound interest
In this matter.
Probably Charles I,
Played the piano—

And, at any rate,
He collected Pictures.

The English would never
Behead anyone
For governing badly ;
It is only Barbarians,
Like the Russians,
Who would do this.
The General
Disapproves of Art.

But, of all these things,
The General says
He dislikes poetry most,
Kipling is different ;
He is a Man-of-the-World.
But the General says
That if he got hold
Of one of these long-haired
Conscientious Objectors,
Who write things
Which don't even rhyme
He'd——

So you see, dear,
That it's better for us
Not to come.

II. AUX BORDS DE LA MER

WHERE frightened woolly clouds, like sheep
Scurry across blue skies ; where sleep
Sings from the little waves that reach
In strict formation to the beach,
Are houses—covers of red-plush,
To hide our thoughts in, lest we blush.

.

Here live kind ladies—hence they come
To persecute us—I am dumb
When they give from wide saucer-eye
Intolerable sympathy,
Or testify solicitude,
By platitude on platitude,
Mix Law-and-Order, Church-and-State
With little tales of Bishop Tait,
Or harass my afflicted soul
With most fantastic rigmarole
Of Bolshevik and Pope in league
With Jewish and Sinn-Fein intrigue—
I love to watch them, as they troop
Revolving, through each circus-hoop
Of new-laid eggs—left at the door—
With Patriotism—for the Poor—
Of ball-committee, Church Bazaar,
All leading up to a great war,
A new great war—greater by far
—Oh ! much more great—than any war.

Kind lady, leave me, go enthral
The pauper-ward, and hospital !

III. GIARDINO PUBBLICO

PETUNIAS in mass formation,
An angry rose, a hard carnation,
Hot yellow grass, a yellow palm
Rising, giraffe-like, into calm
—All these glare hotly in the sun.
Behind are woods, where shadows run
Like water through the dripping shade
That leaves and laughing wind have made.
Here silence, like a silver bird,
Pecks at the fruit-ripe heat. We heard
Townward, the voices, glazed with starch,
Of Tourists on belated march
From church to church, to praise by rule
The beauties of the Tuscan school,
Clanging of trams, a hidden flute,
Sharp as the taste of unripe fruit ;
Street organs join with tolling bell
To threaten us with both Heaven and Hell,
But through all taps a nearing sound
As of stage-horses pawing ground.
Then like a whale, confined in cage,
(In grandeur of a borrowed carriage)
The old Marchesa swam in sight
In tinkling jet that caught the light,
Making the sun hit out each tone
As if it played a xylophone,
Till she seems like a rainbow, where
She swells, and whale-like, spouts the air.

.

And as she drove, she imposed her will
Upon all things both live and still ;

Lovers hid quickly—none withstood
That awful glance of widowhood ;
Each child, each tree, the shrilling heat
Became encased in glacial jet,
The very songbird in the air
Became a scarecrow, dangling there,
While, if you turned to stare, you knew
The punishment Lot's wife went through.

.

Her crystal cage moves on. Stagnation
Now thaws again to animation ;
Gladly the world receives reprieve
Till six o'clock to-morrow eve,
When punctual as the sun, she'll drive
Life out of everything alive,
Then in gigantic glory, fade
Sunward, through the western glade. . . .

IV. ULTIMATE JUDGMENT

WITHIN the sunny greenness of the close,
Secure, a heavy breathing fell, then rose—
Here undulating chins sway to and fro,
As heavy blossoms do ; the cheek's faint glow
Points to post-prandial port. The willow weeps
Hushed are the birds—in fact—the Bishop sleeps.

Then, suddenly, the wide sky blazes red ;
Up from their graves arise the solemn dead,
The world is shaken ; buildings fall in twain,
Exulting hills shout loud, then shout again
While, with the thunder of deep rolling drums
The angels sing—— At last Salvation comes.
The weak, the humble, the disdained, the poor
Are judged the first, and climb to Heaven's door.

.

The Bishop wakes to see his palace crash
Down on the rocking ground—but in a flash
It dawns upon him ;—with impressive frown,
He sees his second-housemaid in a crown,
In rainbow robes that glisten like a prism
“ I warned them . . . ” said the Bishop—
“ Bolshevism ! ”

V. AN OLD-FASHIONED SPORTSMAN

WE thank thee,
O Lord,
That the War is over.
We can now
Turn our attention
Again
To money-making.
Railway-Shares must go up ;
Wages must come down ;
Smoke shall come out
Of the chimneys of the North,
And we will manufacture battle-ships.
We thank thee, O Lord,
But we must refuse
To consider
Music, Painting, or Poetry.

Our sons and brothers
Went forth to fight,
To kill certain things,
Cubism, Futurism and Vers-libre
“ All this Poetry-and-Rubbish,”
We said
“ Will not stand the test of war.”
We will not read a book
—Unless it is a best seller.
There has been enough art
In the past,
Life is concerned
With killing and maiming.
If they cannot kill men
Why can't they kill animals ?

There is still
Big Game in Africa
—Or there might be trouble
Among the natives.
We thank thee, O Lord,
But we will not read poetry.

But as the Pharisees
Approached the tomb
They saw the boulder
Rolled back,
And that the tomb was empty
—They said
“It’s very disconcerting.”
I am not at all
Narrow-minded.
I know a tune
When I hear one,
And I know
What I like—
I did not so much mind
That He blasphemed
Saying that He was the Son-of-God,
But He was never
What I call
A Sportsman ;
He went out into the desert
For forty days
—And never shot anything
And when He hoped He would drown
He walked on the water.

. . . No—we will not read poetry.

THE GROUP

ENGLISH TEA-ROOMS

WHY do they sit in darkness,
Hiss like geese ?
Outside the sun flashes his strong wings
Against the green-slit shutters,
Through which you can see
Him bathing in the street.
Like a bird he preens himself at the windows,
Then dances back with the swimming flash of a gold-fish.
Why do you hiss like geese,
What do you hide,
With your thin sibilance of genteel speech ?

.

The Colonel, usually a rollicking character,
In the manner of El Capitano,
Simpers, like any schoolgirl.
Miss Vera complains that her brother
Is suffering from catarrh.
On the other hand
Hotel-life is easier than home-life,
She just rings the bell,
Orders anything she wants,
—And there it is—punctual to the minute.
Both Sir William and his daughter
Are pleased with their holiday ;
Admire the flora and the fauna ;
Miss Ishmael sketches, and the place abounds
In peasants, picturesque old-bit-and-corner—

.

If they should die . . .
Say only this of them,
That there's a corner in some foreign field
That is for ever England . . .
They travel ; yet all foreign things
Are barr'd and bolted out of range
. . . While England benefits by the exchange. . . .

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

THE gilt-fring'd earth has sadly spun
A sector of its lucent arc
About the disillusioned sun
Of Autumn. The bright angry spark

Of Heaven in each upturned eye
Denotes religious ecstasy.

We, too, have spun our Sunday round
Of Church and beef and after-sleep
In houses where obtrudes no sound
But breathing, regular and deep,

Till Sabbath sentiment, well-fed,
Demands a visit to the Dead.

For Autumn leaves sad thoughts beget,
As from life's tree they clatter down,
And Death has caught some in her net
Even on Sunday,—in this Town,

Tho' money and food and sleep are sweet !
The dead leaves rattle down the street.

Fat bodies, silk-enmeshed, inflate
Their way along ; if Death comes soon
They'll leave this food-sweet earth to float
Heavenward, like some huge balloon.

Religion dims each vacant eye
As we approach the cemet'ry.

Proudly we walk ; with care we bend
To lead our children by the hand,
Here, where all, rich and poor, must end
—This portal to a better land

To which—if in good business—
We have hereditary access ;

Where to afford the Saints relief
From prayer and from religious questions,
Round after round of deathless beef
Flatters celestial digestions ;

Where, in white robe, with golden crown,
We watch our enemies sent down,

To other spheres, while we lean out,
Divinest pity in our eyes,
And wonder why these sinners flout
Our kindly pitying surprise,

Why look so angry when we play
On gold harps as they go away,

A hymn tune, dear, familiar ?
But now we stand within the space
Where marble females drape a tear
Above a whisker'd marble face.

“ Isn't it pretty ? ” Even now
Rich and exotic blossoms grow

About each granite monument
Of men frock-coated, unaware
Of Judgment ; what emolument
Requites a weeping willow's care ?

Look ! Over there a broken column
Is watched by one geranium,

Whose scorching scarlet tones uphold
Damnation and eternal fire
To those who will not reckon gold—
Who are not worthy of their hire,

For marble tombs are prized above
Such brittle things as thought or love.

The crystal web of dusk now clings
From evergreen to tropic tree,
Toss'd by the wind that subtly brings
A mingled scent of mould and tea

That causes silence to be rent
By one scream—childish, but intent.

For children will not realise
That they should rest without a sound
With folded hands and downcast eyes
Here, in the Saint's Recruiting Ground.

And so, in sorrow, we turn back
To hasten on our high-tea track.

But after, in the night, we dream
Of Heaven as a marbled bank,
In which, in one continual stream,
We give our gold for heavenly rank,

Where each Saint, standing like a sentry,
Explains a mystic double-entry.

The Director of the Bank is God—
Stares our foes coldly in the face,
But gives us quite a friendly nod,
And beckons us to share His place.

CORPSE DAY

July 19th, 1919.

DUSK floated up from the earth beneath,
Held in the arms of the evening wind
—The evening wind that softly creeps
Along the jasper-terraces,
To bear with it
The old, sad scent
Of midsummer, of trees and flowers
Whose bell-shaped blossoms, shaken, torn
By the rough fingers of the day
Ring out their frail and honeyed notes.

.
Up from the earth there rose
Sounds of great triumph and rejoicing.

.
Our Lord Jesus, the Son of Man,
Smiled
And leant over the ramparts of Heaven.
Beneath Him
Through the welling clouds of darkness
He could see
The swarming of mighty crowds.
It was in the Christian Continent,
Especially,
That the people chanted
Hymns and pæans of joy.
But it seemed to Our Lord
That through the noisy cries of triumph

He could still detect
A bitter sobbing
—The continuous weeping of widows and children
Which had haunted Him for so long,
Though He saw only
The bonfires,
The arches of triumph,
The processions,
And the fireworks
That soared up
Through the darkening sky,
To fall in showers of flame
Upon the citadel of Heaven.
As a rocket burst,
There fell from it,
Screaming in horror,
Hundreds of men
Twisted into the likeness of animals
—Writhing men
Without feet,
Without legs,
Without arms,
Without faces. . . .

The earth-cities still rejoiced.
Old, fat men leant out to cheer
From bone-built palaces.
Gold flowed like blood
Through the streets ;
Crowds became drunk
On liquor distilled from corpses.
And peering down
The Son of Man looked into the world ;
He saw

That within the churches and the temples
His image had been set up ;
But, from time to time,
Through twenty centuries,
The priests had touched up the countenance
So as to make war more easy
Or intimidate the people—
Until now the face
Had become the face of Moloch !
The people did not notice
The change
 . . . But Jesus wept !

